

Message Text

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11
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01 /085 W
----- 058610

P R 040911Z JUL 75
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2348
INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
USMISSION USUN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR; MO; SS; SP; UN
SUBJ: SPANISH SAHARA: REPORTS OF MOROCCAN/MAURITANIAN DEAL
AND US INVOLVEMENT

RER: A. MADRID 4501 B. RABAT 3166 C. RABAT 3180

SUMMARY: LOCAL PRESS HAS PICKED UP REFERENCES IN "LE MONDE" AND
BY ALGERIAN REP AT ICJ IN THE HAGUE CLEAMING THAT MOROCCO AND
MAURITANIA HAVE MADE DEAL TO SPLIT SPANISH SAHARA AND SET UP
JOINT COMPANY TO EXPLOIT PHOSPHATES AND ALLOW ALGERIA TO EXPORT
IRON ORE FROM TINDOUF TO ATLANTIC PORT; REPORT SAYS U.S.
HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN ARRANGEMENT. ALTHOUGH GOS HAS SET
UP CANARY ISLAND COMBINED COMMAND, IT HAS NOT REINFORCED GARRISONS
IN SAHARA OR NORTH AFRICAN PRESIDIOS BUT LIMITED ITS REACTION
TO RECENT INCIDENTS TO EXPULSION OF UNDESIRABLE MOROCCANS.
GOM HAS REPORTEDLY PORTESTED EXPULSIONS AND CUT OFF SUPPLY
OF MARKET COMMODITIES TO CEUTA. EDITORIALS URGING CHANGE OF
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GOS PLICY AND GOS RESTRAINT IN AVOIDING ESCALATION OF INCIDENTS

IN SAHARA AND NORTH AFRICAN PRESIDIOS INDICATE GOS'S INTENTION
TO KEEP CHANNELS OPEN FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. SPANISH MEDIA HAVE PICKED UP ARTICLE IN JULY 1 ISSUE OF "LE MONDE" BY CORRESPONDENT REPORTING FROM ALGIERS ABOUT "SECRET AGREEMENT BETWEEN RABAT AND NOUAKCHOTT" TO SPLIT UP SAHARA AND EXPLOIT TOGETHER PHOSPHATE DEPOSITS. CORRESPONDENT TOLD THAT AGREEMENT ALLEGEDLY STEMMED FROM BEHIND-THE-SCENES ACTITITIES OF THE US. US MOTIVATION REPUTEDLY WAS TO DIVIDE MAGHREB STATES AND ISOLATE ALGERIA. ARTICLE ALSO REPORTS THAT MAURITANIA HAS JUST TAKEN STEPS TO SHUT DOWN OPERATIONS OF FPOLISARIO ON ITS TERRITORY (SPANISH CORRESPONDENT IN EL AAIUN REPORTED IN "INFORMACIONES" JUNE 30 THAT MAURITANIA HAD CLOSED FPOLISARIO OFFICES IN NOUADHIBOU AND ZUERAT, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE OF FPOLISARIO'S ADVOCACY OF SELF DETERMINATION AND INDEPENDENCE FOR SAHARA WAS INCONSISTENT WITH MAURITANIA'S ASPIRATIONS TO OBTAIN PART OF AREA.) MEANWHILE, LEADING MADRID NEWSPAPER "YA" (INDEPENDENT) ADVOCATED IN EDITORIAL JULY 1, SOMEWHAT SIMILAR LINE AS ADVOCATED BY WEEKEND EDITORIALS IN "ABC" (REF A). "PUEBLO" (REGIME-CONTROLLED) ALSO URGED "REALISTIC GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE" IN JULY 3 EDITORIAL SAYING THAT IF SAHARA COULD NOT BE INDEPENDENT, THEN IT SHOULD BE INTEGRATED INTO MOROCCO. ACCORDING TO "YA" (JULY 3), CORRESPONDENT WAS TOLD BY ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE WHO REPRESENTS ALGIERS AT ICJ, THAT "I CAN CONFIRM TO YOU EXISTENCE OF SECRET AGREEMENT BETWEEN MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA WITH RESPECT TO SAHARA." AMBASSADOR ADDED THAT "PRESENCE OF US IS EVIDENT IN THIS AFFAIR."

2. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS OF ICJ DELIBERATIONS AT THE HAGUE, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MOROCCAN SUPREME COURT, MAGID BENJELLOUN, INTRODUCED IN JULY 1 HEARINGS INTERESTING DISTINCTION BY MAKING EXTENSIVE CLAIM FOR MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER NORTHERN PART OF SAHARA WITH ONLY INDIRECT REFERENCES TO SOUTHERN PART. OBSERVERS AT THE HAGUE TOOK HIS PRESENTATION TO MEAN THAT SOME SORT OF TACTICAL CONCESSION HAD BEEN MADE TO MAURITANIA.

3. "OFFICIAL BULLETIN" ISSUED JUNE 27 CONTAINED DECREE SETTING UP A COMBINED COMMAND IN THE AREA OF THE CANARY ISLANDS WHICH INCLUDES SAHARA. DECREE ALSO PROVIDES FOR A COMBINED JOINT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STAFF TO ASSIST LT. GEN CUADRA MEDINA, THE DESIGNATED COMMANDER OF COMBINED COMMAND, WHO IS CURRENTLY CAPTAIN GENERAL OF CANARIES. (DATT COMMENT: COMBINED COMMAND EXISTED BEFORE BUT DID NOT HAVE JOINT STAFF WHICH DECREE HAS PROVIDED.)

4. LOCAL MEDIA HAVE REPORTED BORDER INCIDENT IN SAHARA JUNE 29 INVOLVING EXCHANGE OF MORTAR AND MACHINEGUN FIRE BETWEEN MOROCCAN AND SPANISH TROOPS WITHOUT ANY CASUALTIES (REF C).

ANOTHER INCIDENT WHICH TOOK PLACE JUNE 30 ON OUTSKIRTS OF PRESIDIO OF MELILLA INVOLVED LOCAL REINFORCEMENT OF BORDER POINT BY SPANISH FORCES AS CONSEQUENCE OF DISPUTE WITH MOROCCAN FRONTIER FORCES (THIS WAS PRESUMABLY INCIDENT REPORTED IN HERALD TRIBUNE JULY 2 WHICH INCORRECTLY SAID THAT REINFORCEMENTS HAD BEEN SENT FROM SPAIN TO MELILLA). DATT HAS CONFIRMED WITH SPANISH MILITARY SOURCES THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO REINFORCEMENT OF PRESIDIOS AS RESULT OF RECENT INCIDENTS.

5. SPANISH AUTHORITIES AND MEDIA HAVE TAKEN PAINS TO GIVE IMPRESSION THAT CONDITIONS ARE NORMAL IN CEUTA AND MELILLA. ALTHOUGH MOROCCANS HAVE PREVENTED SUPPLY OF LOCAL MARKETS WITH FRESH VEGETABLES, GOS HAS DISPATCHED SHIPS WITH THESE SUPPLIES. SPANISH OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO INSISTED THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO INTERRUPTION IN TRAFFIC BY SHIPS CARRYING PASSENGERS BETWEEN SPANISH PORTS AND PRESIDIOS.

6. COMMENT: GOS PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS SEEMED DESIGNED TO AVOID EXACERBATION OF SITUATION IN SAHARA OR IN PRESIDIOS. ALTHOUGH STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO INSURE MILITARY SECURITY IN THESE AREAS, AVOIDANCE OF ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT BE CONSIDERED PROVOCATORY BY RABAT, E.G., REINFORCEMENT OF CEUTA AND MELILLA AS WAS DONE IN FEB 1975 FOLLOWING MOROCCO'S CLAIM TO PRESIDIOS, HELP MAINTAIN ATMOSPHERE OPEN TO NEGOTIATIONS. COMMENTATORS IN LEADING NEWSPAPERS HAVE TAKEN LINE THAT IT IS TIME TO COME TO TERMS WITH MOROCCO.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, BORDER INCIDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975MADRID04672
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750232-0791
From: MADRID
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750783/aaaacwhc.tel
Line Count: 142
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <19 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SPANISH SAHARA: REPORTS OF MOROCCAN/MAURITANIAN DEAL AND US INVOLVEMENT
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MO, SS, SP, US, UN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006